

Cycling for Diverse Communities

A Guide for Groups & Clubs



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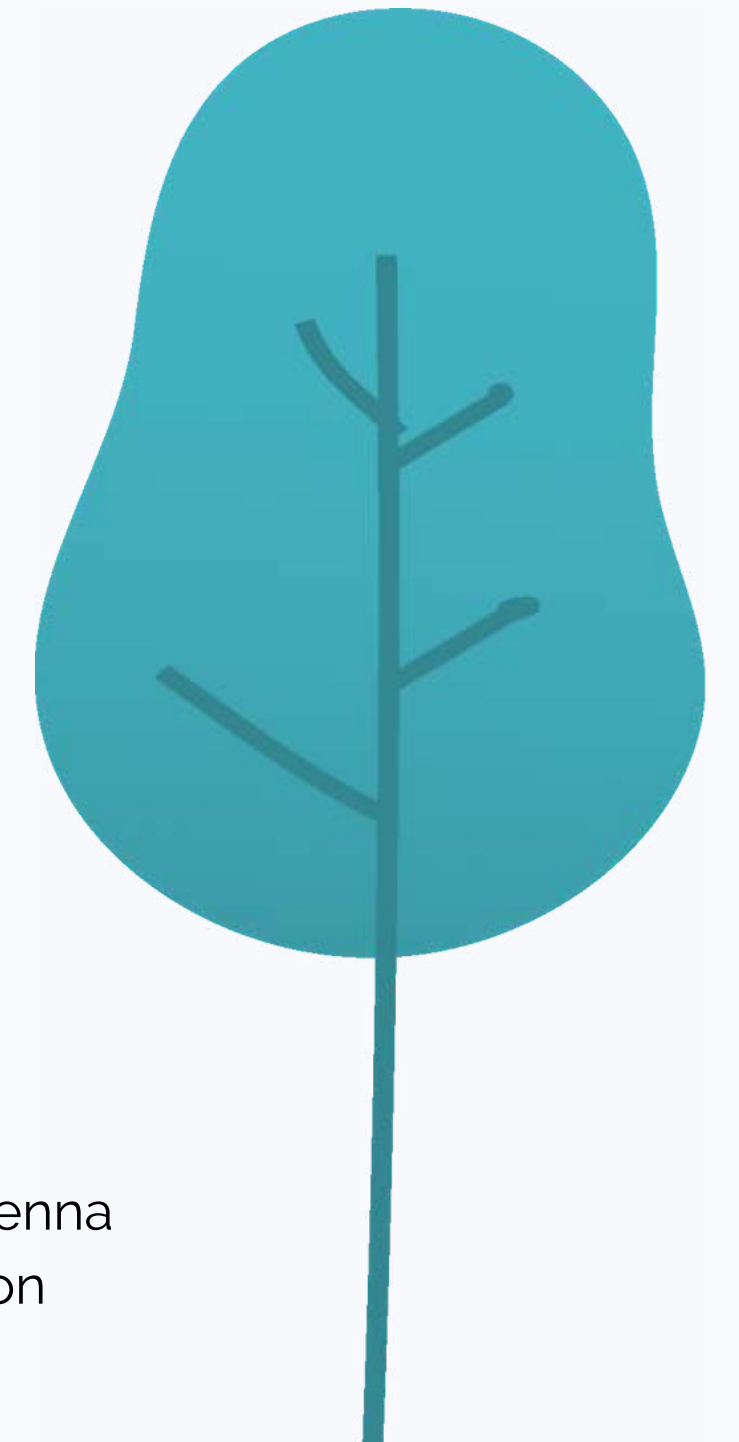


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Salam, peace be with you!

About Cycle Sisters

Cycle Sisters is a charity which aims to inspire and enable Muslim women to cycle. In 2016 we set up our first community cycle group. By 2023 we've grown to a network of **10 groups across London** as well as building a **grassroots movement of 1500+ women** to diversify cycling which has rapidly gained momentum.



About this guide

In this guide we've shared our **key learning about how to run inclusive cycle rides** which can enable more people from diverse communities to cycle.

We recognise that there is huge variety amongst cycle groups and clubs. Not everything we've included in this guide will be relevant to every group or club but we hope there is something to take from our experience whatever your size, history or ambitions.

The culture of a group really matters - what people wear, the timings of rides, the bikes typically ridden and what happens at the social stops are all factors which can exclude people.

We've seen how creating a safe, empowering and supportive space makes it possible for people to feel comfortable to try cycling and change their lives for the better!

Cycle Sisters' experience has been supporting one particular under-represented group, Muslim women, to discover cycling. Championing religious, race and gender equality within cycling is one part of the much broader area of diversity and inclusion in cycling. We are not claiming to be experts - just sharing our experience and hoping it is useful to others.

There are many other inspirational groups doing important work to increase diversity in cycling and we've included a resource list at the end of this guide where you can find out more.

Further training

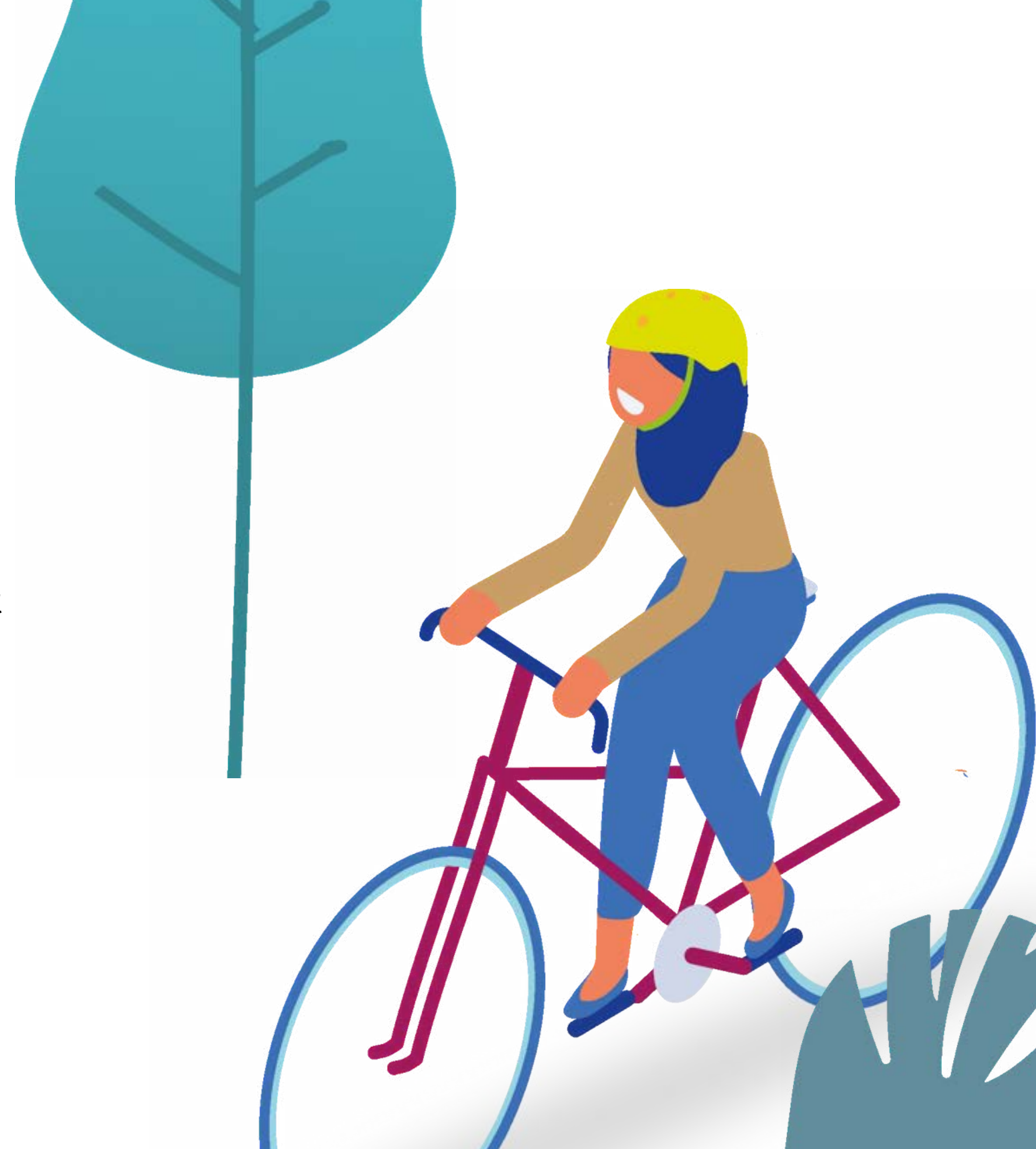
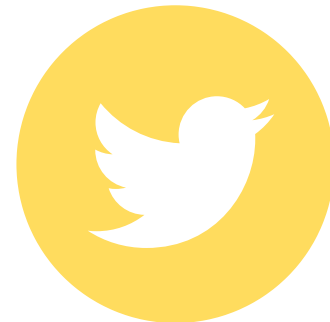
We can provide further 1-to-1 training in any of the areas of this guide. Please get in touch to find out more.

Feedback

We'd like this to be an evolving document which changes and grows with new ideas and perspectives. If you have any feedback or questions, please contact us on salam@cyclesisters.org.uk.

More info:

www.cyclesisters.org.uk





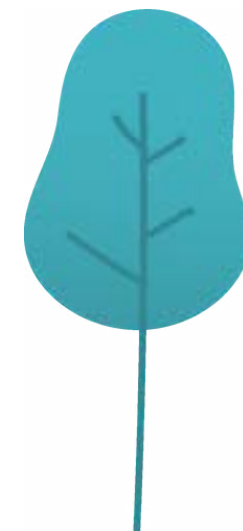
Reflect and set goals

Understanding where you're currently at with regards to diversity and inclusion is an important starting point. Take some time to reflect and have honest conversations with others in your group. This can help to bring your existing members together so that you're on the same page to work for change. These conversations might feel uncomfortable at times but are important.

Here's some ideas:

- **Do you know who attends your rides?** If you don't already collect demographic data (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, disability) about your members, this could be helpful to put in place to track your progress moving forwards.

- **Survey your members and ask for feedback about their experiences in your group.** Do they feel included? Have they had any negative experiences on a ride? If you have people on a WhatsApp group who have never been on a ride, what could enable them to feel comfortable to join?
- **Do your research and find out more about the barriers different groups might experience when it comes to cycling.** Learn about racism and how to recognise it so that you are more prepared to challenge anything that may come up in your group.



- **Identify your values and goals around diversity and inclusion.** Who are you not currently reaching with your rides? What could you change to be more inclusive? Set some goals and deadlines to keep you focused. Consider putting a public statement on your website or social media to let everyone know what you stand for.

The Diversity in Cycling report (2022) is a great resource and we've included a selection of other resources at the end of this guide.



“If it wasn't for Cycle Sisters I would never have tried cycling. The lycra wearing, typical cyclist was so far removed from what I'd even try. I've gone from reluctant to giving it a go to cycling enthusiast and now owning my own bike and cycling with my family too. All without having to compromise what I'm wearing. Cycle Sisters have shown me how cycling can accommodate anyone.”

Aysha





Use diverse imagery

You can't be what you can't see! It's really important to use imagery which reflects the communities you would like to reach and challenges stereotypes around cycling. Seeing yourself represented can make the difference in deciding if a group is for you.

A lack of role models is one of the key reasons that many people from diverse communities don't see cycling as something for them.





Use diverse imagery

Here's some ideas:

- Where relevant, use images which show people cycling wearing **a mixture of helmets / no helmets and everyday clothing**. It's not essential to wear lycra even on a road bike. Many women in the Cycle Sisters' network ride a roadie in their jilbaab (full-length Islamic dress).
- Bear in mind that while it is great for a sense of belonging, **club kit could potentially also come across as a bit exclusive** so mixing up shots with people wearing other clothes could be helpful. The cost of certain clothing can also be a barrier so avoid requiring a kit or any special clothing.

- Where relevant, show people riding **different sorts of bikes** including hybrids, mountain bikes and non-standard cycles.
- Use images featuring people from **different backgrounds** and bodies of all shapes and sizes (with their permission).
- Don't use images in a **tokenistic way which reinforce stereotypes** - for example, that Muslim women just do slow, recreational rides in parks!

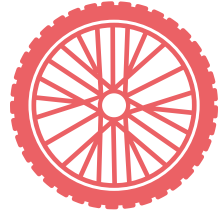


"As a Muslim woman wearing a long loose dress and hijab (headscarf), I didn't think I could cycle. Then I came across Cycle Sisters' Facebook page and saw pictures of Muslim women wearing hijabs and jilbabs (full-length dress) and thought if they could do it, so could I! Only a few years later, I've trained as a Cycle Instructor so I can help other women and girls."

Seema

Read more of Seema's story [here](#).





Use clear and inclusive communication

When you promote your group and your rides, think about how the language you use might come across to someone who is new to cycling. Make sure you include key information which makes it clear that your group is welcoming and accessible to a wide range of people.

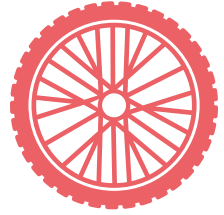
Here's some ideas:

- Try to **avoid using technical jargon** which can be intimidating. Depending on what sort of group you are, where relevant, talk about cycling as an everyday activity. Use the opportunity on rides to explain terms and techniques to people so that they can learn and develop their knowledge.

- Mention **what support will be available** on the ride. For example if there will be Ride Leaders or experienced mechanics and what their role is.

We've found that the presence of trained Ride Leaders on group rides is one of the key factors in making our Cycle Sisters' rides accessible and inclusive - they make our riders feel comfortable and confident to participate.





Use clear and inclusive communication

- Give information about the **ride distance and pace**. Bear in mind that many people may not know their average speed so a simple explanation may be more helpful than miles per hour e.g. relaxed, social pace. Likewise giving a timeframe e.g. 2-3 hours ride could be more relatable than the number of miles so consider including both.
- Specifically say that you can **bring any sort of bike** (even if you are a road club, consider whether someone could use a hybrid or mountain bike).
- Try to **avoid language that can exclude** people e.g. something as simple as saying “clothing should be tight and fitted” could make Muslim women feel that they are not welcome and that wearing longer, looser clothing is not possible on a bike (which it is with some small adaptations - [this article](#) has tips and advice for cycling in looser clothing).
- Consider whether you can make **helmets optional** as well as the need to bring other equipment. A long list of required equipment can put people off coming. There are many reasons people may choose not to wear a helmet including religious headwear such as hijabs and turbans, and financial reasons.
- Specifically mention that you aim to be an accessible group and **welcome new people from all backgrounds and abilities**.
- Include all this info in some **FAQs** for your website so that people know what to expect when joining one of your rides.
- Consider the **communication channels** that are most used by your target demographic. WhatsApp and Facebook, for example, may work well for some audiences but not necessarily for everyone.



“Cycle Sisters being ladies-only and accommodating of Muslim women is a Godsend! I have hardly ridden a bike since I was a child and getting older it felt more awkward - I never felt comfortable, I felt self-conscious with my hijab (headscarf). I like that it's set in a park and on a Sunday morning when it is usually quieter too. The provision of bikes and helmets for free is just brilliant - the whole thing is amazing!”

Faaria





Plan accessible rides

With a bit of thought and planning, you can offer options of rides that can meet different people's needs and make them feel comfortable to join your group.

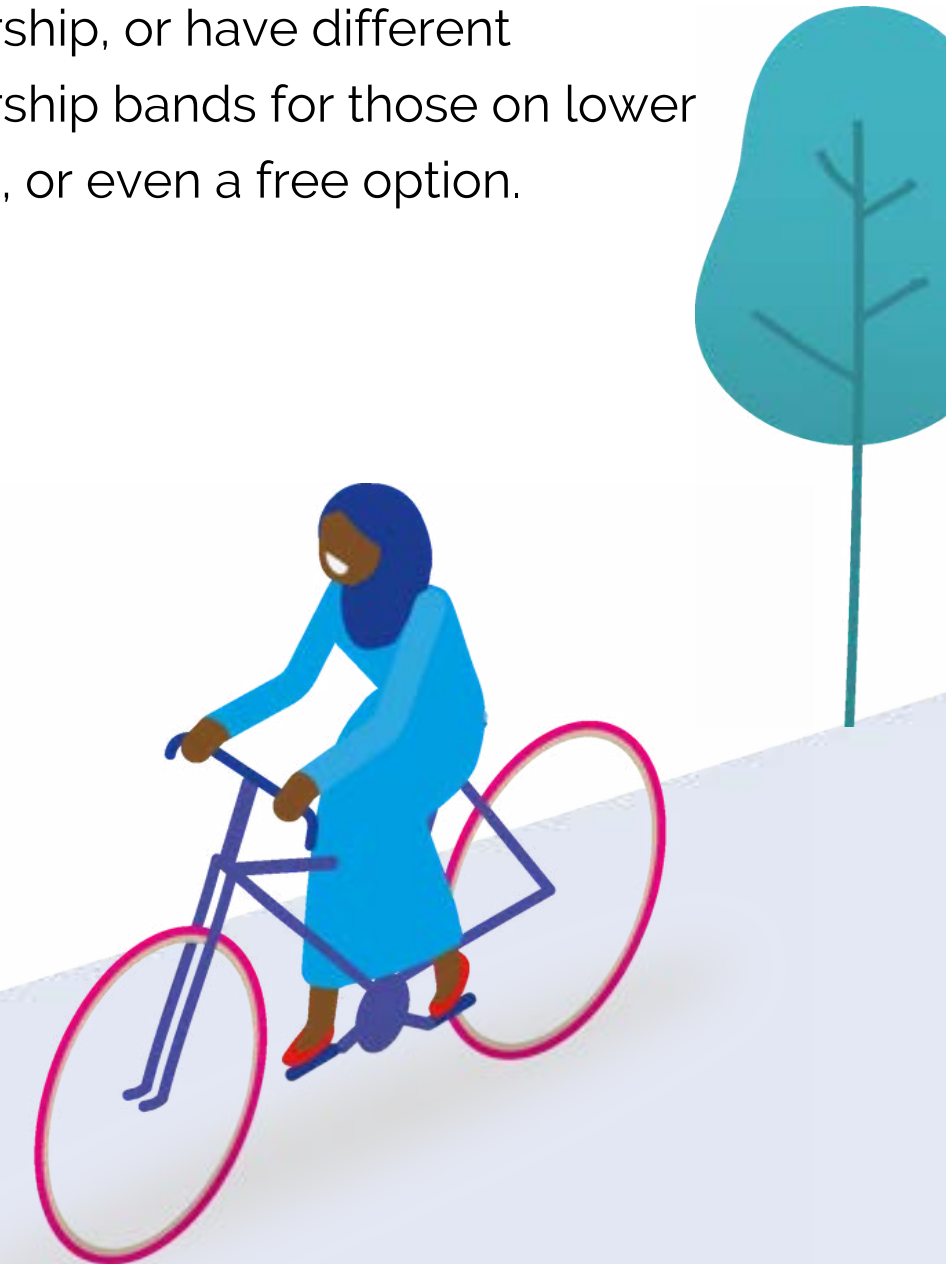
Here's some ideas:

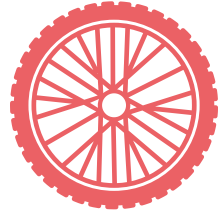
- **Offer a variety of distances.** You could have a regular entry-level ride which has a relaxed pace and a social vibe. Be clear that you can wear whatever you want and ride any sort of road-worthy bike.

We've found that short rides of around 5-10 miles are an ideal entry point for people who are new or less confident at cycling.

- Think about how to **make the start point for your rides accessible** e.g. is the location easy to get to and find; are there toilets located nearby, is there an off-road space where people can have a chance to practice before the ride starts (e.g. to try a borrowed bike or get some tips e.g. on using gears).
- **Different timings** can accommodate people with various home/family/work commitments. Starting weekday rides at least 30 minutes after school-drop off time can make them accessible for people with children. Keeping weekend rides to a morning or afternoon rather than in the middle of the day can also often work better for those with families. Evening sessions may be a good option for those who work full-time.

- Consider how to make your **membership scheme more inclusive** if you have one. For example, could you offer a certain number of rides for free before having to commit to membership, or have different membership bands for those on lower incomes, or even a free option.





Plan accessible rides

- Many women prefer **women-only rides** for cultural or religious reasons or just because it feels more comfortable especially when trying a new activity like cycling. If you are a mixed-gender group, consider offering a regular women-only option with female Ride Leaders.
- Offer **skills-based rides or sessions** where people can develop their cycling techniques and knowledge. This can feel less intimidating to join initially and help to build confidence to participate in other rides in the future.
- Could you **lend bikes for your rides?** We've found that offering free bikes for rides is one of the most important ways you enable people to start their cycling journeys. Some councils have a pool of bikes which are used for council staff or cycle lessons and may be able to give your group access to use for your rides.

- Another option is starting your rides at a **bike hire docking station** if there is anything local to you. If this isn't possible, you could have a **Dr Bike mechanic** at the start point to check over bikes which may not have been used for a while.
- **Choose cafes over pubs for rest stops** so that it is accessible for those whose cultural or religious values or lifestyle choices mean they don't drink alcohol. Mentioning that you can bring your own snacks and refreshments rather than having to buy something is also more inclusive of those who may not be able to afford it. Riders from Muslim backgrounds may need to stop during the ride to pray during the set prayer times - often this will only take 5-10 minutes and could be accommodated during a rest stop.



“I always used to borrow one of the council bikes for the rides which was a great way to get started without having to commit to buying a bike, but I needed to buy a bike with a child seat after having my daughter. I got some great advice from Cycle Sisters and finally, two years after starting cycling, I bought my first bike. I loved that bike so much!”

Maryam

Read more of Maryam's story [here](#).





On the ride itself

Joining a cycle ride where you don't know anyone for the first time can feel very intimidating. There's a few things you can do to help put people at ease.

Here's some ideas:

- **Greet everyone individually with a smile.** Going up to someone and having a brief conversation to find out a bit about them makes people feel welcome. It also gives you the chance to find out whether anyone has any particular needs, disabilities or communication preferences to be aware of during the ride.
- **Do a round of introductions** before you start the ride making sure it's clear who the Ride Leaders are.

- A **pre-ride briefing** can be really helpful to explain how things will work on the ride so that everyone knows what to expect.
- You could **buddy up** a new rider with a regular rider to ride alongside each other and provide support during the ride.

First impressions make a big difference to someone's experience and whether they feel comfortable to come back and keep going with their cycling journey.





On the ride itself

- Ride Leaders or more experienced riders can **share tips** during the ride such as how to use gears on hills.
- **Ride at the pace of the slowest rider** so that they feel comfortable and can enjoy the ride. Putting anyone new or slower behind the front Ride Leader makes it easier to set a suitable pace.
- Make sure everyone has someone to talk to during the **cafe stop** and is being included in conversations.
- Ask for **feedback** at the end of the ride about people's experience and whether they have any suggestions for how rides could be improved.



"I'm an introvert and sometimes find socialising quite challenging so I've been surprised how comfortable I've felt. Each ride has its own special moments - you end up cycling next to different sisters and hearing their stories. I've discovered that cycling is my comfort zone to meet people and socialise. I feel different when I come home after the rides - lighter and brighter somehow."

Shabnam





Reach out and grow

Once you've done some planning around how to make your rides and group more inclusive, it's helpful to think about how you're going to spread the word and reach your target audience.

Here's some ideas:

- Think about where you could **promote your rides** in order to reach new people e.g. community Facebook groups, council websites, community noticeboards, places of worship, community events etc.
- **Actively engage in promotion** with communities that are currently not represented in your group. If you have any existing members who are from a community that you'd like to reach, ask if they can help with outreach and be an ambassador (although not everyone may want to do this).

- Reach out to **other inclusive cycle groups** to ask for help. For example you could do a joint ride together or make a partnership whereby you signpost people to each other's groups.
- **Invest in developing people** from different communities e.g. to train as Ride Leaders, coaches, mechanics or cycle instructors. These individuals can act as inspiring role models among their own communities who people can identify with.
- Look at the **make-up of your committee or leadership team** and consider how diverse it is. Reach out to people from different backgrounds to take on leadership roles and provide any support needed. Ensuring that the experiences and needs of different people are represented when making decisions about your cycle group is a good way of becoming more inclusive and reaching new people.



“I wanted to become a Ride Leader to help other women like me to have the confidence to cycle wearing a niqab (face veil) and a hijab (head scarf). I didn't have a role model like that when I was starting out so I hope I can be that person for other women to inspire and motivate them.”

Rabia

Watch more of Rabia's story [here](#).



The Cycle Sisters Model



This infographic shows a summary of the key features of Cycle Sisters' community cycle groups model which could be replicated for other communities.

Barriers to cycling

In the following pages, we've shared some of the key barriers to cycling faced by Muslim women based on the experiences of our riders. When thinking about barriers, it's important to remember that everyone's individual experience is different and not to generalise or make assumptions. Many of these barriers are also shared with other communities.

Barrier	How Cycle Sisters helps
Fear of cycling safely on the roads	Group rides with trained Ride Leaders give people confidence to cycle on the roads. Bikeability cycle lessons can further develop skills in road confidence. Connect with local cycling campaign groups, speak to local council and ensure that the voices of under-represented communities are heard by those planning cycling infrastructure.
Concerns around social safety, racism and Islamophobia	Ride Leaders and other group members act as role models and demonstrate that people from all backgrounds can cycle. Riding in a group can feel safer especially when starting out. Encourage riders to report any racist or Islamophobic incidents they experience.

Barrier	How Cycle Sisters helps
Lack of equipment or storage facilities	Offer free bikes to borrow for group rides and signpost people to local initiatives such as bike hire and storage schemes, second hand bike shops and Dr Bike events. Make helmets optional on rides and be clear that no specialist clothing is required.
Lack of skills and confidence to cycle	Group rides provide a safe and supportive space for people to try cycling and build skills. Train and support Muslim women to become Cycle Instructors and signpost riders to Bikeability cycle lessons to learn to ride a bike or cycle on the roads.
Not seeing yourself represented in cycling	Muslim women in leadership roles such as Ride Leaders and Cycle Instructors as well as other group members act as visible role models who people can relate to. Share photos, videos and stories on social media to reach a wider audience and reinforce the message that anyone can cycle.

Barrier	How Cycle Sisters helps
Concerns around what to wear to cycle and perception that you have to wear lycra and tight-fitting clothing	Groups provide a space where wearing Islamic and looser/modest clothing is the norm. Ride Leaders and other group members demonstrate that you can wear all sorts of clothing to cycle and share tips and advice.
Negative cultural attitudes towards cycling	Muslim identity of groups helps individuals and their families to feel comfortable. Work in partnership with community leaders and institutions such as mosques to promote and normalise cycling.
Don't feel comfortable to join existing cycle groups or have had negative experiences of being excluded	Logistics of rides meet needs e.g. women-only spaces, timed around prayers, cafe stops rather than pubs, shorter rides or break during Ramadan. Group provides a safe and supportive space where people don't have to compromise or justify values or lifestyle choices and women know they won't feel like an outsider.



This is not an exhaustive list - it is inspiring to see more and more diverse cycle groups starting up all the time. If there are other groups that would be useful to include on this list, please email us on salam@cyclesisters.org.uk.

Muslim cycling initiatives

[Brothers on Bikes](#)
[Cycling Sisters Bristol](#)
[Evolve](#)
[Fasted500](#)
[Gapped Podcast](#)
[Muslim Women Cyclists Facebook group](#)
[Nuhiha](#)
[Saheli Hub](#)

Community Cycling Groups

[Black Cyclists Network](#)
[Black Women on Wheels](#)
[Black Unity Bike Ride](#)
[Colour Collective](#)
[CycleOut London](#)
[Cycle Together](#)

[Freedom50](#)
[Hop On](#)
[JoyRiders](#)
[Londra Bisiklet Kulubu](#)
[Pride Out](#)
[Ride on Sistas](#)
[Sikh Cycling Network](#)
[The Bike Project](#)
[Together We Ride](#)
[Velociposse](#)
[Wheels for All](#)
[Wheels For Wellbeing](#)
[Women of Colour Cycling Collective](#)
[Women on Wheels](#)

Reports & Research

[A Guide for Inclusive Cycling](#), Wheels for Wellbeing, 2021
[Active Travel Podcast](#) - various episodes on different diversity topics
[Cycling for everyone: A guide for inclusive cities and towns](#), Sustrans, 2020
[Cycling Potential in London's Diverse Communities](#), TfL, 2021
[Diversity in Cycling 2nd edition](#), Andy Edwards, 2022
[Diversity in the Cycling Industry](#), Bicycle Association, 2023
[Does more cycling mean more diversity in cycling?](#) Dr Rachel Aldred, James Woodcock & Anna Goodman, 2015





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